



Pick Your Path to Health

Lifelong Spirituality

Margo Johnson was at the top of her profession. A 36-year-old managing editor for a national college textbook publisher, she had achieved many of her goals. From her corner office, she supervised a 60-person staff, which kept her both busy and challenged. But her career had taken her two time zones away from her family on the West Coast and her dating life had evaporated. It was time for a change. She gave two weeks notice, rented a moving van, packed up her belongings, and drove from Texas to Los Angeles to start a new chapter of her life.

"I am not a natural risk taker, but I was lonely," said Margo. "As the holiday season approached, I realized I did not want to miss any more family celebrations, especially those that include my aging parents, nieces, and nephews."

Now able to pop in at her sister's home for dinner on a weeknight, she has regained a valuable connection to her family and has given a tremendous boost to her spirit.

Johnson is not alone. *In The Pursuit of Happiness*, psychologist David Myers notes that in study after study, researchers have found that people who have a "big picture" approach to life are happier and more satisfied than those who are self-centered.

John Donne once said, "No man is an island, entire of itself..." This is the very definition of spirituality: that each person's life is part of a greater whole. How do you see spirituality-as life after death, as recurring cycles of life, or as the legacy of your ancestors? The essential point is that we share a connection with others. And, it is our participation in things beyond us-family, community, and faith-based groups-that most enriches our lives.

Reconnecting does not need to be as dramatic as quitting your job and moving across the country. You may already live with or near your extended family members. In this case, exploring your roots may help you discover another part of yourself and how you fit into the larger family. Exploring your shared past with family members can help you connect with values of earlier times and places, while gaining additional information about your family's history.

Try this. Look at old photos with one of your parents or grandparents. Ask about who is in the pictures, and how they influenced that person's life and the entire family?

Or maybe you need to take a different approach. Maybe you are involved in too many community and recreational activities, and you feel you aren't doing any of them well. If this sounds like you, carve out some time to be by yourself. Take a walk (ideally in a park or other setting you enjoy), listen to or play music, or read something inspirational to refresh your spirit.

Lyndsey, a 42-year-old mother of two, used to dread walking her dog each night. "I live in the middle of the city, so I have to walk my dog-usually the last thing I want to do after working all day." But at some point, I realized walking was an opportunity to get regular, daily exercise and be alone with my thoughts-not easy to do in a house with two small kids. I valued this the most after my father passed away. I used the time on the walk to think about and, in my own way, communicate with him."

If you are a parent, you may want to share some silence with your children. This is not impossible. Take a few minutes to discuss your thoughts about spirituality with them, including how each of us contributes to the world. Then listen to what spirituality means to them.

Whether walking or relaxing quietly, taking time to reflect on what is most meaningful to you can provide you with insight into becoming more peaceful and content. Connecting with your spiritual side can mean giving to others in volunteer work, or perhaps to a more internal focus, taking the time to discover what truly lifts your spirits. In either case, exploring your spirituality is a lifelong journey-the most important one we take.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign or to request weekly health tips by e-mail, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or TDD at 1-888-220-5446 or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov>